

**Opening Statement**  
**The Honorable Jared Huffman**  
**Subcommittee on Water, Power, and Oceans**  
**Wednesday, December 6, 2017**  
**Legislative Hearing on H.R. 4465**

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I appreciate that the focus of today's hearing is a bipartisan bill that recognizes the importance of stakeholder collaboration and balances the environment with water and power needs. It is a stark contrast from the Majority's tactics in this Subcommittee last week, when we discussed a one-sided bill that attacked environmental laws and diminished the years-long efforts that went into the Yakima Basin Plan.

H.R. 4465 reauthorizes funding for programs to help recover four endangered species within the Upper Colorado and San Juan Rivers. These programs bring together water users, environmental groups, tribes, local utilities, and state and federal agencies to find ways to ensure water and power needs are met in a sustainable way that accounts for species protected under the Endangered Species Act. We need exactly these types of partnerships, not so-called streamlining, so that the significant impacts of power generation and water supply don't lead to the extinction of native fish species in the Colorado River.

Over the last few decades, the recovery programs in the Upper Colorado Basin have kept these unique fish alive. It is no small feat, and I applaud the many partners, including our witnesses here today, who have worked to make sure more species aren't lost to extinction. We face many similar challenges in California and I understand the significant effort and cooperation that's required from everyone involved. These programs in the Upper Colorado River Basin have made progress towards addressing some major threats to these endangered fish species, including mitigating nonnative species and instream flow management.

Although I support the bill and recognize the work of the recovery programs thus far, we must also address the underlying causes of native species loss in the Colorado River basin: a highly altered river ecosystem and dwindling water supply. In addition to the important habitat it provides for a wide range of species, the Colorado River basin supplies water to nearly 40 million people across 7 states in addition to Mexico. It provides irrigation to millions of acres of land and power for millions of people and hundreds of local communities. It is also a valuable resource to more than 20 Tribes and to the outdoor recreation economy across the region.

In addition, it is especially concerning that the Colorado River Basin has been experiencing an unprecedented drought since 2000. It is the worst drought in the past hundred years and one of the worst in the past thousand years, threatening endangered species, the ecosystem, and the roughly 1 in 10 Americans who rely on it. We've already seen dramatic changes in the Colorado River Basin as a result of this drought. -In March 2017, the warmest in history, the temperatures were almost 9 degrees above the historic average. This has serious implications for the snowpack in the Upper Basin, which supplies nearly 90 percent of the water for the already strained system, where more water is taken from the reservoirs than is replenished each year. Unfortunately, research shows that we should prepare for a future that includes more frequent and extreme droughts, like the current one, as a result of climate change.

A drier, hotter climate in the West will make it more difficult than it already is to meet user and environmental water needs in the future. With less water, more people, and increasingly threatened species, it will be critical to address ways to restore ecosystems and modernize water infrastructure, rather than keeping the status quo. In addition to this bill, we should focus on water reuse, recycling, removing aging and obsolete dams, and other new ways to meet the water needs of growing populations while ensuring a healthy environment for future generations. If not, our rivers may become nothing more than holding tanks and we'll

have to keep endangered species on life support indefinitely. I don't think anyone here wants to see that happen.

I am encouraged, albeit surprised, that several of my colleagues from the other side of the dais are cosponsors of this bill. In the past, there have been endless claims from the Majority that this kind of species specific recovery approach does not work. I'd argue that it does, given that these four fish and 99 percent of all listed species under the ESA are still around. But it would make it much easier to recover species with sufficient funding and without continued attempts by Committee Republicans to weaken the Endangered Species Act. If the four endangered species addressed in this bill are important enough for funding, I hope we can later talk about why the rest of them are too.

Thank you to the witnesses for being here today, and I look forward to hearing from you.

I yield back.